
Explaining the Cosmos: Creation and Cultural Interaction in Late-Antique Gaza by Michael W. Champion

Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 241. ISBN 978–0–19–933748–4. Cloth £48.00, \$74.00

Reviewed by
Lorenzo Perrone
University of Bologna
lorenzo.perrone@unibo.it

The last two decades have seen a remarkable renewal of interest in Late Antique Gaza, which contrasts positively with the recurring tragedy and isolation of the Palestinian city nowadays. Several studies have addressed different aspects of Gazan religious and intellectual history from the fourth to the sixth century. In early Byzantine Palestine, a region that became more and more Christian despite its continuing multiethnic and multi-religious environment, Gaza remained a stronghold of paganism until at least the beginnings of the fifth century. Generally, research has not dealt at once with both the pagan and the Christian Gaza of Late Antiquity, thus suggesting the picture of two separate worlds: on the one hand, the ancient Hellenistic heritage of the rhetorical school of Gaza, which in conformity with the Second Sophistic was not devoid of philosophical concerns; on the other hand, the new tradition of Christian theology and especially of monasticism that flourished in the vicinity of the city during the fifth and sixth centuries. Even in recent research, we find few exceptions to the separate treatment of these topics. The essays collected by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky in their pathbreaking volume *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* [2004], as suggested by its title, mainly focus on the ecclesiastical and monastic life, although they include some contributions on pagan festivals, urban games, and spectacles, as well as on the literary activity of the sophists and their social status. Shortly afterwards, the two editors produced an important monograph, *The Monastic School of Gaza* [2006], which restricts the perspective further by investigating the ascetic ideals and practices of the great spiritual masters of Gazan monasticism. A step towards a more comprehensive approach was made with the first of a series of symposia, held in Poitiers in 2004, of which the proceedings were published by Catherine Saliou [2005]. Saliou's volume

tries in particular to exploit the results of archaeological excavations (undertaken only for a short period in more peaceful circumstances than at present) and to interact with historical and literary inquiries centering on the works of the sixth-century sophist Choricius. A second conference, organized in Paris in May 2013, has sensibly enlarged the scholarly approach for the first time in order to mirror the many elements of the Late Antique culture of Gaza. Its proceedings [Amato, Corcella, and Lauritzen 2017] certainly provide a stimulus for further investigations, as already shown by the new initiatives of the organizers of the Paris conference, who have created a research group and have launched a website (<http://ecoledegaza.fr/>) devoted to their current activities.

Against this scholarly background, here essentially summarized for the sake of brevity, Michael W. Champion's book should be regarded in its scientific orientation and general structure first of all as an effort to overcome the above-mentioned duality of approaches and thus to gain a more inclusive view of the cultural and intellectual landscape of Late Antique Gaza, both pagan and Christian. More precisely, as indicated by its title, the author aims at retracing the dynamics of cultural interaction in light of a central tenet of Christian belief—the doctrine of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*—in response to the attacks on it by Neoplatonism with its idea of an eternally existent world. For this purpose, Champion takes three of the most famous authors of Gaza as crown witnesses and one of each of their works as a text of reference. In chronological order, they are:

- (1) Aeneas of Gaza and the philosophical dialogue *Theophrastus*;
- (2) Zacharias Rhetor and the *Ammonius*, a work similar in nature; and
- (3) Procopius of Gaza and his *Commentary on Genesis*.

In Champion's words,

through an analysis of how these writers seek to effect change in their local cultures, I aim to explain the distinctive features of Late Antique Gazan society and intellectual culture. [2]

Consequently, the book, after the introduction, is divided into two parts, devoted respectively to cultural history (1. 'Creating Gazan Cultures') and to intellectual problems (2. 'Explaining Creation'). A short conclusion ('Creation Creating Cultures') retraces the main lines of the investigation while providing suggestions for further research. A substantial bibliography, not

restricted to secondary literature in English, concludes the book together with an *index locorum* and general index.

The core of the book should be sought in the longer, second part, although Champion lays the ground for it through the preliminary challenge of a ‘cultural history’ of Gaza, in which the three selected authors come to play their converging roles. I speak purposely of a ‘challenge’ because I am aware that to retrace the cultural interaction of Late Antique Gaza with its multiple tensions and contrasting protagonists remains a difficult task. Therefore, I appreciate the intention of the author but the picture that he draws is far from being satisfactory.

In an introductory assessment, Champion discusses the methodological issues and rejects a too-rigid pattern of conflicting cultural and religious models:

While the Gazans thus partly construct their arguments and preferred religious identity through conflict and opposition, we also find them quietly borrowing and adapting ideas or proudly claiming other identities they share with their non-Christian neighbors. Careful examination of their works reveals elements of Gazan society more open to difference and supports a model which takes conflict as just one element in the construction of ideas and associated cultural practices and personal identities. [7]

Here, Champion reacts also to Glanville Downey’s view according to which Gaza should be viewed ‘as a place where it was thought “more suitable, and also in better taste, to keep Christianity and classical thought quite separate”’ [34n59]. He might be right so far as the authors of his investigation (and more specifically their respective works) are concerned; but the plurality of the ‘local cultures’ of Late Antique Gaza—to use the author’s terms—does not always display the openness and capacity to adapt for which he is pleading.

Let us consider Zacharias Rhetor, later bishop of Mitylene. Apart from the problem of using him and his *Ammonius* as evidence of the Gazan cultures *tout court*, in as much as his career played out mostly elsewhere, we still have to consider that his transition from monophysitism to Chalcedonian orthodoxy is not representative of the ecclesiastical situation of Gaza in the period ranging from the council of Chalcedon (451) to the reign of the philo-Chalcedonian Emperor Justin (512–527). Zacharias probably ‘had moved to the Chalcedonian camp by the early years of the reign of Justin and Justinian’ [12]. In contrast, Severus of Antioch, a former fellow student in

Alexandria and Berytus, concerning whom Zacharias wrote a biography, remained a staunch opponent of the council of Chalcedon throughout his life. With this uncompromising attitude, he continued in the Gazan monophysite movement, led by such intransigent personalities as Peter the Iberian or John Rufus. Regarding this group, which seems to have influenced the Christian communities of the Gazan region for more than half a century, we should take into account a dogmatically motivated conflictual ‘interaction’ or ‘self-seclusion’ to use the author’s terms. Occasionally, Champion proposes his own interpretative model in contrast to the reconstruction worked out by Edward J. Watts, though he surprisingly does not quote Watts’ recent monograph [2010]. For Watts, to understand Zacharias’ defense of the destructibility of the world in the *Ammonius*, one should consider his connections with Peter the Iberian and the anti-Chalcedonian monasteries of Palestine [2010, 138–142]. Moreover, as Watts says in referring to the experience of students in Alexandria and Berytus who were influenced by the Iberians,

these were young men who particularly valued truth and, perhaps for this reason, found themselves uncomfortable overlooking the cultural ambiguities that often allowed Christians to cull from pagan learning ‘whatever was useful while smiling at the myths’ [Choricus of Gaza, *Laud. Marc.* 1.2.6.1–4 = τὰ κάλιστα συλλέγων μὲν ὃ τι χρησιμον ἔφν, προμειδιῶν δὲ τοῖς μύθοις]. [Watts 2010, 141]

In a similar way, Champion rejects the portrait of Procopius traced by Bas ter Haar Romeny because, as Champion sees it, the apparent fluctuation of this Gazan rhetor between the ‘pagan’ and the ‘Christian’ is to be explained in relation to the diversity of literary genres [15]. Nevertheless, he shares Haar Romeny’s conviction that the exegetical commentaries of Procopius were used for educational purposes in the rhetorical schools. But Karin Metzler, in her new edition of Procopius’ *Commentary on Genesis* [2015, xxvii–xxx], has recently formulated justified scepticism concerning such an assumption about the use of exegetical commentaries in the rhetorical schools.

A presentation of the schools in Late Antique Gaza follows the initial prosopographical sketches of the three Gazan authors. Champion attempts to retrace the larger cultural network of the city, including contacts with Caesarea within Palestine and with Alexandria and Antioch without. Actually, apart from the mention of a few names, we do not know much about ‘Caesarea’s pagan schools, which had recently been built up by figures such as Acacius, Libanius, and Orion’ [24: cf. 37]. Instead, it is reasonable to assume

the importance of the Christian library of Caesarea to the intellectual life of Late Antique Gaza, at least for the exegetical enterprise that Procopius undertook in his biblical *catenae* and commentaries [38], though we cannot exclude the impact of libraries located in Gaza and elsewhere (for instance, in Jerusalem). Champion then exploits the findings of the *auditoria* of Kôm el-Diqqa in Alexandria for his reconstruction of the settings of the schools, even if he is wisely aware of the diversities of local situations [30]. The picture resulting from this analysis largely rests on more or less generic inferences and parallels, whereas the rich literary panorama of Gaza in the fifth and sixth centuries, besides the triad of authors under examination, takes a more precise shape with the emergence of several significant figures: Zosimus of Ascalon, a commentator on Lysias and Demosthenes; the poet and rhetor John of Gaza; the sophist Choricus; the Latin grammarian Hierius; and the grammarian and naturalist Timothy of Gaza. Champion does not mention the name of another famous sophist of this period, Dionysius of Antioch, the addressee of Aeneas' *Epist.* 17 [43], who with his letters is a source comparable to Aeneas and Procopius. Nor does he recognize the direct involvement of Aeneas in the administration of justice as witnessed by Aeneas' *Epist.* 3 and 24 as well as by Procopius, *Epist.* 82–83 [Lilla 2000, 267].

To complete the description of the Gazan cultural and religious setting, Champion adds some information about monasteries, relying on Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky's *Monastic School of Gaza* [2006]. The connection of the intellectual *milieu* of Gaza with the monastic experience is suggested by the famous passage of Zacharias' *Life of Isaiah*, in which the sophist asks the recluse for the interpretation of passages in Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. Yet more caution is demanded in depicting the intellectual profile of Gazan monasticism than we find in Champion's reconstruction. According to Champion, Origenist monks supposedly settled in Gaza already before the end of the fourth century, whereas the emigration from Scetis to Palestine was more likely prompted by the attacks of nomadic tribes on the Egyptian site [39n86]. Champion refers to the monastic family of Silvanus, recorded in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. But in light of this source (and of Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.36), there is no good evidence to support the idea that this group of monks distinguished itself as a 'cultivated circle'. Also, the portrait of Peter the Iberian, a Georgian prince and formerly a hostage at the court in Constantinople, is presented in too generic a way to allow a grasp of his education [40], in spite of the fact that he has been identified

by some with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (a controversial claim that Champion understandably does not mention, although he should have paid some attention to the work of Pseudo-Dionysius for his investigation into late Neoplatonism and Christianity). Even more relevant is the fact that the author—for the sake of his putatively ongoing ‘cultural interchange’ in Late Antique Gaza—completely ignores the events of the ecclesiastical history of the city in this period. Accordingly, as he would have it, ‘Gaza at the turn of the sixth century was a city of overlapping local cultures, where the dominant explanatory categories were exchange, interaction, and transformation’ [42]. As I hinted above, this ‘optimistic’ picture does not fit well with other narratives in which opposition and closure dominate, such as the writings of John Rufus, the monophysite bishop of Maiumas of Gaza (especially in his *Plerophories*).

To explain how the ‘local cultures affect the lives of the three’ [43], Champion addresses Aeneas’ letters in the wake of the recent treatment of Procopius’ epistolary output by Eugenio Amato [2010]. His point here consists in showing the influence of Neoplatonism, although the letters rather constitute a document in the rhetorical *paideia* of the Second Sophistic (if we should not adopt the expression ‘Third Sophistic’ precisely in view of the sophists of Gaza themselves). As such, the letters undoubtedly reflect Aeneas’ social standing and cultural connections more than the ‘dominantly Christian framework’ as stated by Champion [46]: Aeneas’ letters have apparently nothing in common, for instance, with the correspondence of the two recluses Barsanuphius and John of Gaza in the first half of the sixth century. So far, Champion does not succeed in providing a proof deriving from ‘the power of Plato and Aristotle within this culture’ [49], whereas the settings of Aeneas’ *Theophrastus* and Zacharias’ *Ammonius* point instead to the intellectual scene of Alexandria and Athens. So, for Champion,

Gaza is...a place which interacts with both Alexandria and Athens, and without minimizing the particular importance of Alexandria, the Gazans’ works seem directed more generally against Neoplatonic culture. [51]

With regard to the two Neoplatonic schools of Late Antiquity, Champion adheres to the opinion prevalent nowadays that there was no substantial difference between Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism. But there are doubts that this was actually the case: I recommend Cristina D’Ancona’s careful examination of this *communis opinio* [2005]. Champion, consistent with

his approach, makes Theophrastus, the Athenian philosopher who is the pagan interlocutor of Aeneas' dialogue, the witness of 'a wider culture where Neoplatonism and Christianity were able to coexist peacefully and constructively' [54]. At the same time, he must admit the tension beyond 'peaceful coexistence' in as much as Zacharias' *Life of Severus* shows conflicts among pagans and Christians arising in the Alexandrian schools [54–55]. It does not come as a surprise if 'Aeneas and Zacharias both use the dialogue form to perform Christian victories over Neoplatonism, especially its religious claims' [59]. Apart from this common aspect, Champion notes the differences of language and argumentation between the two authors, pointing to Zacharias' resorting to stories taken as proofs of miracles from the Bible and monastic literature. I wonder whether instead of stressing in Zacharias 'the generative and regulatory role played by the Bible in the dialogue's transformed discourse' [61–62], Champion should have evaluated instead the impact of the 'plerophoric' materials so typical of some monastic sources of Gaza. As for the recourse to the dialogue-format by Aeneas and Zacharias, Champion overemphasizes the significance of this choice:

Their use of the genre asserts that Christians can write and think like Plato. It elevates Christianity above Platonic philosophy while claiming continuity with the classical past. [62]

He seems to forget the rich production of dialogues in ancient Christian literature, proving that it was a format serving mainly apologetic and polemical goals but also philosophical/doctrinal inquiries, as is the case in both the *Theophrastus* and the *Ammonius*. The author also discusses the choice made by the two Gazan authors with respect to literary genres at their disposal—such as the commentary and the questions-and-answers literature—by observing that

the dialogue genre merges into a Christian variety of question and answer literature (*Erotapokriseis*) which is designated to place power in the hands of specifically Christian teachers and form a new tradition based around the authority of Christian teachers...Procopius' *Commentary on Genesis* also tends in this direction. [64]

Once again, I would distinguish the ζητήματα καὶ λόσεις, which have a rich tradition of their own in patristic literature, from the proper genre of the dialogue; whereas Procopius' commentary may function as a 'Problemkommentar', though it is built on another distinct genre, the exegetical *catena*.

Champion concludes the first part of his book by recalling once more the interpretative line which has marked his approach from the start:

The dominant picture is one of complex interactions between different but permeable local cultures, despite the attempt on the Gazans' part to eliminate what they see as false religious claims or doctrinaire honoring of the Neoplatonists' traditional intellectual heroes. [66]

Without repeating critical remarks expressed above concerning the religious landscape of Late Antique Gaza, I would argue nonetheless that Champion does not offer a persuasive picture of Neoplatonism, with its philosophical discourse and religious claims, as being an effective and immediate component of the Gazan 'local culture'. On the basis of his investigation, both Aeneas and Zacharias appear to evoke an intellectual environment which is largely external to the Palestinian city itself (and perhaps even more traditional than actual), although both the authors of Gaza are involved in its dynamics.

The second part of the book, and the longest, examines the Christian doctrine of the creation of the world and the contributions to it by Procopius, Aeneas, and Zacharias. Previously, Champion has retraced the patristic background of the doctrine while also discussing its relations with (Neo-)Platonism. He provides in general a clear, well-informed, and well-written exposition of this fundamental chapter of Christian theology and Late Antique philosophy. Unfortunately, he does not know Charlotte Köckert's *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie* [2009], which is at present the best monograph on this topic. Though Köckert does not go beyond the fourth century (apart from occasional hints at the Gazan philosophers), she provides an excellent treatment of an important premise for Champion, which is also a recurring problem in his analysis: Origen's influential formulation of the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* and the ensuing rejection of the (Neo-)Platonic idea of the eternity of the world.¹

Champion initially recalls that Origen opposes the notion of an eternal world as held by Platonic philosophy:

Creation was not, for Origen, an eternally willed act. While the act of creation is consistent with God's eternal nature, the act to will the creation did not always

¹ For an assessment of the results of Köckert's investigation, see the masterly review by Manlio Simonetti [2011, 464–471].

exist: it is ‘realized’ in the creation which, for Origen, had a beginning. [73: cf. 75, 120]

Yet this statement tends to simplify the more complex reasoning of the Alexandrian master, which Champion will partially recuperate only later on. For now, he passes over Origen’s response to the traditional objection, ‘Was then God inactive before creating the world?’: God’s goodness and omnipotence demand that he is always active; therefore, the world existing *ab aeterno*, as the product of God’s perennial activity as creator, is the intelligible world (κόσμος νοητός) that exists in the Son as Wisdom.²

The further witnesses of patristic thought on creation, often depending upon Origen’s reflection, help us to define the perspective elaborated by the Gazan authors. On the one hand, Basil of Caesarea, and even more so John Chrysostom, in their efforts to trace a Christian view, tendentiously mirror a philosophical horizon preceding the approach more typical of Neoplatonism, thus providing a case which is not without analogies in our authors of Gaza. For example, Zacharias explicitly follows Basil in polemically attributing to his philosophical adversaries the thesis of an automatic or involuntary creation of the world. As Köckert notes with reference to the notion of the world as παρακολούθημα in the *Ammonius* [Köckert 2009, 528–534 = Minniti Colonna 1973, 112]:

Basilius und Zacharias zielen beide darauf, die gegnerische Position so darzustellen, daß in ihr Gott nur indirekt oder gar nicht als Ursache des Kosmos erscheint. [Köckert 2009, 339]

On the other hand, Aeneas and Zacharias, when compared to the two Church Fathers, address an audience demanding ‘a different sort of engagement with the biblical text and with contemporary Platonism’ [80]. In fact, a main issue of this second part of Champion’s book consists in the problem of the extent of dependence or, alternatively, of originality that one should assign to the Gazan authors. Champion betrays at times mixed feelings: ‘Perhaps the Gazans’ knowledge of contemporary Neoplatonism was limited and indirect, mediated through other, better informed Christians’ [84]; however, ‘a general familiarity with Proclus’ ideas seems to be a plausible stimulus for their

² See *De princ.* 1.4.3–4, a passage that Champion will quote on page 141, belatedly recalling ‘Origen’s important contribution that the creation of an intelligible cosmos before time rebuts charges that God was ever inactive’.

creation-oriented works' [85]. So Proclus especially appears to play the role of their polemical counterpart. But, before dealing with the philosophical/theological discourse of the Gazan triad, Champion completes his picture of the Neoplatonic doctrines with an accurate presentation of the ideas of Hierocles and Ammonius, his aim being to outline the immediate background for the debate that the three Christian authors engaged in with their pagan partners, thus complementing the work of Elias Tempelis [1998].

The overview of this critical confrontation begins surprisingly with Procopius of Gaza, who is chronologically the last in the triad. The reason is that Procopius' *Commentary on Genesis* 'provides a useful framework and introduction for analysis of their [*scil.* Aeneas' and Zacharias'] works' [105]. In short,

Procopius reframes Neoplatonic arguments about creation, making the creation of the cosmos part of an encompassing story about God's divine plan for human salvation. [106]

But Champion's analysis of the *Commentary* does not consider its particular literary physiognomy: an epitome resulting from a previous *catena*-commentary and reusing as such materials from other interpreters. As shown in Karin Metzler's new edition, the commentary starting with the prologue unveils a complex stratigraphy of sources [2015, xciii–cxxiii].

Moreover, the rendering of the Greek text of the preface appears problematic: Champion paraphrases the passage « οἱ προφήται καθάπερ κάλαμον τὴν γλῶτταν ὀξύγραφῳ παρέχονται γραμματεῖ » [Metzler 2015, 1.4–6 = PG 87.24A] as 'The prophets act like a flute through whom God breathes' [107]. Yet, in conformity with the quotation of Ps. 44(45):2, which Champion does not notice, it should be translated, 'The prophets lend their tongue (to God) as the pen of a quick scribe'. Another passage shortly afterwards is misunderstood as well: « ...θεοῦ τὰ λόγια παρ' ᾧ ψευδὸς οὐδὲν ἢ ἄλογον. καὶ δεῖ ὅσα μὲν εὐσεβῶς δυνήσῃ νοῆσαι κρατεῖ » [Metzler 2015, 2.8–9 = PG 87.24B]. Champion interprets it as follows: 'it is necessary to control oneself and be pious as possible when thinking about Scripture' instead of 'you should retain what you will be able to understand conforming with piety', inasmuch as Scripture consists of 'the oracles of God, in which there is neither lie nor anything irrational'. Furthermore, he lacks precision when he extrapolates that 'Moses had direct knowledge about God's plan to send Jesus to redeem the world' [108]. Instead, Procopius, relying on a traditional interpretation, says that Moses saw God

through the fissure of a rock; that is, he received the knowledge of the Father granted by the Incarnate Son (typologically the ‘fissure of a rock’): «ὅτι δὲ πέτρας ἢ διὰ τοῦ σαρκαωθέντος δι’ ἡμᾶς υἱοῦ γνώσις ἐστὶ τοῦ πατρὸς» [Metzler 2015, 2.17-18 = PG, 87.24B].

Metzler, in her apparatus to these passages, refers, among the possible sources, to Origen, *Hom. in Ieremiam* 16.2, while suggesting more generally a dependence of Procopius on the Alexandrian author:

wegen der Parallelen zu Origenes, Philon und Johannes Philoponus vielleicht ganzer Absatz nach Origenes, comm. in Gen. [Metzler 2015, 2: cf. cxvii].

Yet Champion seems to be less attracted by an accurate reading of the text than by the venture of its interpretation. After identifying, perhaps too hastily, ‘a rebuttal of Origenist ideas taken from the Gazan monasteries’ [109] with respect to Procopius’ comments on the creation of the angels, he does not ask who might be the adversaries claiming that the ‘darkness’ of Gen. 1:2 [Metzler 2015, 15.40–42 = PG 87.44B] ‘referred to an ungenerated principle of cosmic evil’ [111]. This passage, following an argument of Basil [*Hom. in hexaem.* 2:4], contains a clear allusion to Manichaeism, the presence of which in Gaza is attested by the *Life of Porphyry* and Zacharias’ *Capita VII contra Manichaeos*.³ Yet Procopius could also mean the notion of the eternal matter as a principle of evil that we find, for instance, in Middle Platonists (Plutarch and Atticus) or in Numenius. According to Köckert, for Numenius

wie Gott seinem Wesen nach aus sich selbst heraus gut und Ursache alles Guten ist, so ist die Materie an sich und aus sich selbst heraus böse und Ursache aller Übel. [Köckert 2009, 108]

Without trying to define the polemical targets in more precise terms, Champion resorts once more to a problematic generalization:

When I claim that Procopius is directing an argument against ‘Neoplatonists’, I mean both Neoplatonists who would not identify themselves as Christian, and people who would identify as Christians, but whose allegiance to Neoplatonism leads them, in Procopius’ view, to hold beliefs which set them outside established Christian orthodoxy. This is another instance of the problem of fluid identities and cultural transitions which characterized Gazan life in the fifth and early sixth centuries. [111: cf. 115]

³ On the connection between anti-Manichaean polemics and Neoplatonism, see Ben-nett 2015, pages 19–33.

My impression, however, is instead that at issue here is the ‘stability’ inherent in topical discussions of the schools, in which a traditional set of arguments plays a greater role than actual developments by groups or individuals—the assembling of previous exegeses in Procopius’ *Commentary* might be regarded as an eloquent symptom of that. As a consequence of his approach, Champion hesitates now and then regarding the specific public that Procopius is addressing, in as much as he is led to recognize that the Gazan rhetor does not mirror properly the philosophical tenets of current Neoplatonism:

Yet the argument surely works most forcefully against Christians in the schools tempted to give up on Christian distinctions between creator and creature, and the subsequent identification of eternity and necessity, than against an audience already committed to the detail of Neoplatonism. [123]

But the prevalence of a Christian audience could be argued more simply in light of the format chosen by Procopius: a biblical commentary that essentially reworks the exegeses of other Christian interpreters.

The final chapter is devoted to the cosmological thought of Aeneas and Zacharias. The presentation of the former stresses his convergence with Procopius on many points (such as the rejection of the temporal equivalence between creator and creature or of the Stoic idea of eternal return). Aeneas’ discourse, however, is mainly directed against contemporary Neoplatonism. Its polemical target is especially Proclus with his hierarchy of creative causes supporting the emanation process. Champion shows how Aeneas is able to recuperate Origen’s motif of the intelligible world as an argument to support God’s perennial activity, whereby ‘the idea of the original creation of an intelligible realm’ is not

analogous to Proclus’ paradigmatic cause, because the intelligibles thus created have no necessary part in the creation of the perceptible world. The perceptible world is dependent on God’s will alone, not on the intelligible creation. [147]

Aeneas’ distinctive contribution is stressed also by comparing it with Zacharias’ approach. Champion lists three major points emphasized by the latter:

First, he uses more explicitly orthodox language....Secondly, he brings the argument back more consistently to Plato, rather than contemporary figures. [147–148]

The third and final difference between Aeneas and Zacharias on the question of matter concerns the relation between the intellectual and the material worlds. [150]

In this regard, Zacharias shows a greater continuity with Origen since ‘the creative principles are eternally in the Creator’s mind and set within matter to order it’ but God ‘creates willingly and freely on the basis’ of these principles [150]. Also in this case, if I am not mistaken, we need to emphasize a feature that comes to light in the following section dealing with the relation between the doctrine of creation and the Trinity, namely, that Zacharias, unlike Aeneas, ‘uses credal language and language authorized by Church Fathers more prominently than Aeneas in his account’ [164]: note his explicit reference to Gregory of Nazianzus on the procession of the Spirit from the Father [165].

A final paragraph investigates the influence of ‘Origenist ideas about creation’ in Aeneas’ dialogue, in as much as ‘Gazan monasteries...were a possible source’ [175] for their rise. From the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, we do indeed have evidence that Origen was also read in Gaza, although the Palestinian ‘Origenism’ of the sixth-century refashions Origen’s doctrinal heritage through Evagrius and finds its adepts mostly among the monks of the Judean Desert. Champion thus goes back again to a theme that we have already met more than once: Origen’s idea of an intelligible world related to the Son both as the paradigmatic or formal and as the efficient cause of creation. He bases himself on *De princ.* 1.1.1–6; *Comm. in Ioh.* 8.42 and *Contra Celsum* 5.39 to assert that ‘the act of creation includes the creation of the reasons for creation’ [175]:

These created principles are understood to be in the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, who contains, but is not defined by “the *logoi* of everything which has been created” (CC 5.39). [175]

After that, Champion resumes the well-known ‘narrative’ of the fall of the pre-existent intellects and the creation of the material world through which time comes into existence. Still, due to the loss of the *Commentary on Genesis*, it is difficult to solve all the issues raised by Origen’s account of the worlds creation (κοσμοποιΐα), as Champion must admit himself [175–176].

Now, in Evagrius’ reshaping, ‘Origen’s *logoi* are understood as pure, invisible, and rational creatures which were created and existed in a perfect unity with God’ [177]. Against this *vulgata* of Origen’s and Evagrius’ views (which should be further differentiated as far as the former is concerned with an

eye to to Köckert's monograph), Champion cannot extract any really helpful information on the supposed Origenism of Gaza from the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, apart from the reading of both Origen and Evagrius in the cenoby of Seridus.⁴ On the other hand, after observing that Aeneas seems to be more acquainted with Origen than with Evagrius [181], he wonders whether the *Theophrastus* has its real target in the Palestinian Origenists in a disguised way; that is, by 'taking Neoplatonists as his explicit opponents' [182]. Not content with this explanation, he moves to another risky hypothesis:

The increased number and urgency of debates about creation at the turn of the sixth century, for which the works of Aeneas, Zacharias, and Procopius are evidence, may provide one stimulus for renewed controversies over Origen's account of creation. Aeneas' dialogue and the associated works by Zacharias and Procopius may therefore be one stimulus for the sixth-century Origenist controversy. Further work remains to be done on this question. [182]

I agree with the final sentence. But so far as we know, the 'Origenism' of the sixth century was concerned with Christology and anthropology more than with cosmology.

Champion has written an orderly and readable book about a major subject and an interesting 'location' which nowadays attracts the specialists of Late Antiquity for its complex cultural visage. He undoubtedly displays a good ability for synthesis, especially in the second part of his work, by summarizing and positively exploiting previous research. However, his picture, in consequence of his synthetic and comparative overview of the Gazan triad, falls into generalities. He is to a large extent right when he pleads for a reevaluation of the three Gazan authors as philosophers instead of regarding them essentially as sophists [193] and the book will certainly provide a useful introduction to their future study. Yet the combination of cultural and intellectual history, which structures the investigation, is developed by Champion in too schematic a way. The search for the cultural interaction of the Christian discourse on the creation of the world in Late Antique Gaza is commendable, even if occasionally it betrays a contemporary sensibility. But too often it leads the author to schematic or speculative interpretations. To

⁴ Not only were Evagrius' 'practical' writings appreciated by the monastic communities as Champion assumes [180], but also his 'gnostic' writings.

cope with the different 'local cultures' of Gaza, both Hellenistic and Christian, demands further work.

Errata with corrections

I append a selection of errata with corrections and some minor remarks:

- page 9 'Palestina Prima' → 'Palaestina...'
- 13n33 'Devros' → 'Devos'
- 16n52 'Devreese' → 'Devreesse'
- 22 'the letters of St Jerome offer a fleeting perspective on Gaza in the early fifth century' (What evidence? On page 37 there is just a quotation of *Epist.* 34.1 with regard to the library of Caesarea.)
- 23 'Marcion' → 'Marcianus'
- 23 'stabilization after second- and third-century conflicts'—with regard to Palestine, one should write '...first- and second-century...'
- 27n27 'Tsafir' → 'Tsafrir'
- 32n49 « διατρίβη » → « διατριβή »
- 33n58 « Ἀραβι » → « Ἀραβι »
- 39n83 'The other monk with a claim to being the father of Gazan monasticism is Chariton' → '...of Palestinian monasticism'
- 71 'Judeo-Christian thinkers' → 'Jewish and Christian thinkers'
- 73 « ἕτερόν τινα » → « ἕτερόν τινα »
- 73n9 'Exposita in Proverbia' → 'Expositio in Proverbia'
- 'Selecta in Psalmi' → 'Selecta in Psalmos'
- 76 'Praeparatio Evangelia' → 'Praeparatio Evangelica'
- 85 'Minitti Colonna' → 'Minniti Colonna'
- 89 « λόγος » → « λόγος »
- 95 « αἰώνιον » → « αἰώνιον »
- 96 « αἰδιον » → « αἰδιον »
- 111 « εἰσάγοντες » → « εἰσάγοντες »
- 125 « καθ' αἰτίαν » → « κατ' αἰτίαν »

- 129 Champion emends the text of *PG* 87.33A: « εἰ ἅμα κόσμος <ὁ Θεὸς> » but he should reconstitute it as « εἰ <ἅμα Θεὸς> ἅμα κόσμος », as clearly suggested by the parallelism with the analogous formulations following in Procopius' text (in fact, Metzler's edition now reads « εἰ ἅμα Θεὸς ἅμα κόσμος » [8.188])
- 165 'probalea' → 'probolea'
- 210 'Devros' → 'Devos'
- 221 'Tsafir' corrige 'Tsafrir'
- 222 'Vössing...Überleungen' → '...Überlegungen'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- PG* *Patrologiae cursus completus*. Series Graeca. J. P. Migne ed. 1857–1866.
- Amato, E. 2010. *Rose di Gaza. Gli scritti retorico-sofistici e le epistole di Procopio di Gaza*. Alexandria.
- Amato, E., Corcella, A., and Lauritzen, D. edd. 2017. *L'école de Gaza. Espace littéraire et identité culturelle dans l'antiquité tardive*. Leuven.
- Bennett, B. 2015. *The Physics of Light, Darkness and Matter in John the Grammarian's First Homily against the Manichaeans: Early Byzantine Anti-Manichaean Literature as a Window on Controversies in Later Neoplatonism*. Pp. 19–33 in S. G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer edd. *Mani in Dublin*. Leiden/Boston.
- Bitton-Ashkelony, B. and Kofsky, A. 2004. *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*. Leiden.
- 2006. *The Monastic School of Gaza*. Leiden.
- D'Ancona, C. 2005. 'Il neoplatonismo alessandrino: alcune linee della ricerca contemporanea'. *Adamantius* 11:9–38.
- Di Berardino, A. 2000. *Patrologia*. vol. 5. Genoa.
- Köckert, C. 2009. *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie: Die Auslegung des Schöpfungsberichtes bei Origenes, Basilus und Gregor von Nyssa vor dem Hintergrund kaiserzeitlicher Timaeus-Interpretationen*. Tübingen.
- Lilla, S. 2000. *Enea di Gaza*. In Di Berardino 2000, 265–274.

-
- Metzler, K. 2015. *Prokop von Gaza. Eclogarum in libros historicos Veteris Testamenti epitome: I. Der Genesiskommentar*. Berlin.
- Minniti Colonna, M. 1973. *Zacaria Scolastico. Ammonio. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commentario*. Naples.
- Saliou, C. 2005. *Gaza dans l'Antiquité Tardive. Archéologie, rhétorique et histoire*. Salerno.
- Simonetti, M. 2011. 'Eusebio eresiografo. Un libro recente'. *Adamantius* 17:464–471.
- Tempelis, E. 1998. *The School of Ammonius, Son of Hermias, on Knowledge of the Divine*. Athens.
- Watts, E. J. 2010. *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities*. Berkeley, CA.